

Frequently Asked Questions

Comprehensive Tolling Study

Why is the Washington State Transportation Commission conducting a comprehensive tolling study?

In 2005, the State Legislature directed the Commission to conduct a study of the state's transportation system to determine the feasibility of using tolls on specific transportation facilities or a network of facilities in the state. The study will establish a framework for uniformly implementing tolling in the state, should the legislature decide to do so, and will also look at alternative tolling policies on the new span of the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

What is the Washington State Transportation Commission?

The Commission is a seven-member independent citizen body, charged with advising the state on transportation-related matters. The responsibilities of the commission include preparing the state's transportation plan and working with the Governor, the State Legislature, the Secretary of Transportation and others across the state to formulate transportation policy. The Commission also oversees the implementation of transportation policy and operational plans for highways, ferries and intercity passenger rail.

What is the goal of the Commission's comprehensive tolling study?

The study will help the State make policy-level decisions on if, where, when and how to use tolls in the state. It will address ways that tolling can be used to provide funding for transportation projects, as well as ways tolling can be used to better manage traffic congestion. The study will consider current and emerging technologies, social and environmental impacts, organizational and administrative frameworks, and legal and regulatory constraints. It will describe different types of projects and provide a framework for decision making to help the Commission to identify candidate projects for tolling. The study will also investigate

the opportunities and alternatives for setting toll policies on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

Has Washington ever used tolls?

Yes. Tolls are not new to Washington. In fact, tolls are the traditional method of financing the construction of major bridges in the state. Since 1940, 15 bridges have been constructed using bonds backed by tolls, including Evergreen Point Bridge (now SR 520), Hood Canal Bridge, the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and the Vancouver/Portland Bridge (I-5).



Is the state currently considering any tolling projects?

There are currently two tolling projects underway in the state, both authorized by the legislature. They demonstrate two examples of the many ways tolling can be used.

The Tacoma Narrows Bridge is part of a \$1.4 billion project to improve SR 16 between Tacoma and Gig Harbor in the Puget Sound area. Bonds backed by tolls paid by bridge users are funding the \$800 million cost of the new parallel bridge. In addition, \$600 million in state funds is being used for major improvements on SR 16.

SR 167 High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes is a traffic-management project that will make more effective use of carpool lanes by allowing solo drivers to pay a fee each time they access the converted carpool lanes. Drivers would obtain a small electronic toll collection device and would not have to stop at traditional toll plazas.

The Comprehensive Tolling Study is also looking at the Alaskan Way Viaduct, SR 520 Floating Bridge, I-405 Managed Lanes and SR 704 "Cross Base Highway" among others.

Is tolling a feasible way to manage traffic congestion?

Combined with new electronic toll collection systems, tolls and user fees are a proven way to make better use of existing roads and provide new choices and faster rides for commuters. States such as Minnesota, Texas and California are making better use of existing roadway capacity, building new express toll facilities and implementing user fees to manage congestion. In Texas and California, new express lanes have been built in existing medians, and in Minnesota and California, underused carpool (HOV) lanes have been converted to High Occupancy Toll or HOT lanes.

These programs allow solo drivers, who choose to do so, to install a small electronic toll collection device and use the lanes for a fee and without stopping. Carpoolers, motorcyclists and transit buses usually ride free. Tolls are priced so that traffic in the lanes stays free flowing and this in turn results in faster, more reliable commute times.

Can the public become involved in the study?

A plan is being developed as part of the study to assess public attitudes. To stay informed about the project, the public is invited to attend regular Commission meetings held in various locations around the state. To find out more about Commission meetings and agendas, go to www.wstc.wa.gov.

Who is conducting the study?

The Commission is assisted in the \$1 million Comprehensive Tolling Study by the Washington State Department of Transportation and a consulting team of local and national experts led by Cambridge Systematics, Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusetts to carry out the study.

Cambridge Systematics provides expertise in the areas of transportation policy and strategy, long-range planning, economics and travel-demand forecasting. Other members of the team are PBS&J for organizational and administrative considerations, cost estimating and financial feasibility; Texas Transportation Institute for social equity and fairness issues and a national perspective on public attitudes; IBI Group for technology and operational issues; Frank Wilson & Associates for communications and a plan to assess public attitudes; Mirai Transportation Planning & Engineering for assistance with travel-demand modeling; and Foster Pepper & Shefelman PLLC to advise on legal and regulatory concerns.

When will the report be completed?

The final report will be delivered in July 2006.

